

# Message to Constituents

## U.S. Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

Representing the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congressional District of Maryland

May 24, 2004  
<http://www.mail.house.gov/cummings>

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Washington, DC 20515  
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Dear Constituent:

It is both a privilege and an honor to represent you in the United States Congress. While serving you, I will continue further outreach efforts to inform you of legislative action in Congress. I welcome your advice. Government “by the people” is the cornerstone of my legislative philosophy.

To better serve you closer to home, I invite you to visit or contact one of my district offices, which I have listed on the following pages. In Howard County, my staff and I make regular outreach visits at various community centers. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Elijah E. Cummings

### Congressman Cummings Makes Recommendations After Hearing on Faulty Medical Lab Testing

Following a hearing held by the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, Congressman Cummings recommended several possible strategies in order to ensure that patients get accurate lab results for medical tests. Held at the request of Congressman Cummings, who is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the hearing investigated recent allegations of erroneous HIV and Hepatitis C test results that may have been given to thousands of patients at Maryland General Hospital (MGH) in Baltimore. Specifically, the hearing investigated the extent of these types of medical mistakes in hospitals across the nation.

The hearing included testimony from several witnesses involved in the development of the matter. The witnesses who testified were former lab employee Teresa Williams; Adaltis, Inc., the manufacturer of the lab device used in the medical tests; the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which reports problems for certain medical devices; the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which regulate testing; University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS), the parent company of MGH; College of American Pathologists (CAP), which accredited MGH; and Nelson Sabatini, Maryland Secretary of Health & Mental Hygiene. In addition to these witnesses, former employee Kristin Turner submitted a written statement.

Based on the testimonies, Congressman Cummings suggested the following possible actions:

1. **Better whistleblower protection for hospital employees:** During the hearing, former employees testified that upper management instructed them to remain quiet about problems with lab equipment.
2. **Better communication:** Testimony revealed that various state and federal agencies had information on the faulty lab test procedures, but lack of proper communication channels inhibited immediate action.
3. **Time Tables for Action:** It was also revealed that various hospital officials as well as state and federal agencies did not act in a timely manner.
4. **Expanded regulatory authority for federal agencies:** This would allow agencies to act immediately upon gaining information involving unreliable lab testing equipment.

## **Congressman Cummings Announces \$345 million in Federal Tax Credits for 4 Businesses**

As a strong supporter of economic growth in Maryland, Congressman Cummings announced on May 5 that four Maryland businesses will receive a total of \$345 million in federal tax credit allocations through the New Markets Tax Credit Program. Administered by the U.S. Department of Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, the New Markets Tax Credit Program allocates tax credits for investors who finance economic development projects benefitting low income communities.

"These tax credit allocations will help spur economic growth and stimulate Maryland's economy by improving investment in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County," Congressman Cummings said. "The investments will help residents finance their first home, start a small business, or expand a business."

The U.S. Treasury CDFI Fund awards money or tax credits that help community-based organizations working in disadvantaged urban and rural communities across America. These monies, in turn, help finance residents who want to buy their first home or individuals that may want to start their own businesses such as a coffee shop, beauty salon, or speciality book store. In addition, the funding helps existing businesses expand. The \$345 million allocated to the four 7<sup>th</sup> District businesses will help various small businesses obtain financing to build charter schools, healthcare facilities, retail centers, and to support the East Baltimore Biotech Park.

Specifically, the New Markets Credits Program allows investors to receive a credit against federal income taxes for making investments in designated Community Development Entities (CDE). Those who invest in these companies receive tax credits (as allocated to the company) in exchange for stock or capital interest in the CDE. The CDE then utilizes the money to help revitalize distressed communities.

The 7<sup>th</sup> District businesses which received the New Market Tax Credit Allocations are:

**1. ESIC New Markets LP, in Columbia, which will receive \$140 million** in tax credit allocations. ESIC's Enterprise Foundation provides real estate investment products to underserved communities. According to company President Charles W. Werhane, the allocation will help ESIC to support construction projects that are currently in the process of building charter schools and healthcare facilities in central Maryland.

**2. CDF Development, LLC**, which through its entity in Baltimore, the Cordish Company, will receive \$100 million

in tax credit allocations for providing loans to large-scale retail projects in low-income urban communities.

**3. The Community Development Funding, LLC**, in Clarksville, through its entity CBO Financial, will receive \$55 million in tax credit allocations for investing the expansion of non-profit community organizations that serve severely economically-distressed areas.

**4. Harbor Bankshares Corporations in Baltimore**, which will receive \$50 million in tax credit allocations for providing various investment funds for small businesses and real estate services. Part of these funds will also go toward the East Baltimore Biotech Park.

## **Congressman Cummings Expresses Deep Concern Over Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners**

Congressman Cummings expressed grave concern after viewing photographs of abused Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison. The photographs, shown only to Members of Congress in a closed-door briefing on May 12, showed graphic images of U.S. soldiers severely abusing and humiliating prisoners.

"The shocking images from Abu Ghraib prison hardened my resolve to hold everyone involved accountable – no matter how high in the chain of command this duty takes us – and to do everything within my power to assure that this inhumanity stops," Congressman Cummings said.

He added, "These actions violated the international conventions that are designed to preserve our shared humanity – even in times of war."

In its oversight role, Congress must act swiftly and decisively to determine what abuses occurred; who was responsible; who in our government was informed about these abuses; when they were informed of these abuses; and what actions have been taken to assure that these human rights violations are never permitted to happen again.

"America's standing in the world as a civilized nation is at stake," Congressman Cummings said.

Congressman Cummings also called for the resignation of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, a chief architect of the war in Iraq.

"The Bush Administration has failed to provide leadership to punish the perpetrators and to address the lapses in the chain of command," Congressman Cummings said. "The Administration, as soon as they learned of these atrocities, should have informed Congress, and sent the strongest message possible to the world that this type of behavior cannot be tolerated, ever."

## **Congressman Cummings Discusses Medicare Discount Drug Cards with Seniors**

On May 3 and May 11, Congressman Cummings visited the Charlestown Retirement Center in Catonsville and the Morningside Park Apartments in Jessup, MD, to discuss the new discount drug program approved by Medicare.

### **Discount Drug Cards**

A predecessor to the prescription drug plan set to begin in 2006, the discount drug program allows seniors to sign up for Medicare-approved cards that give them discounts on some of their prescriptions. Seniors could begin signing up for the card beginning May 3, with the card being effective June 1 through December 31, 2005. For a maximum cost of \$30, seniors can buy this discount drug card from a private company such as a pharmaceutical firm, HMOs, or insurance company. The companies who offer the card were required to have the card approved by Medicare.

Congressman Cummings noted that although the discount cards have been approved by Medicare, they are not administered by Medicare. This means the cards are not required to give discounts on any medicines.

"For many seniors, the card can cause a burden because the patient may get a discount on some medicines, while having to pay double for another," Congressman Cummings said. "This is further complicated by the fact that a Medicare recipient may only sign up for one card at a time and may not change cards during the course of the year."

Because the Medicare-approved card does not guarantee comprehensive discounts on all medicines, Congressman Cummings urged seniors to carefully look at all their options before signing up for the card. Seniors may call 1-800-MEDICARE or go to <http://www.medicare.gov> for further help in sorting out what card is best for them.

### **Low-Income Discount**

The most positive aspect of the discount drug card, Congressman Cummings said, is an annual \$600 credit that low-income seniors who do not qualify for Medicaid can receive. To be eligible, a senior must have an annual income of no more than \$12,569 for a single person or \$16,862, if married. The recipient is also exempt from paying the enrollment fee of \$30 or under.

However, seniors need to be careful because once Medicare qualifies the senior for the credit, the individual must choose only one card offered by various private companies. Then, with each pharmacy transaction, individuals pay a 5% to 10% co-pay and deduct the balance from the \$600 allocated to them.

"About 4.7 million seniors will benefit from this credit,"

Congressman Cummings said. "I am working with my colleagues to ensure that all seniors would pay a very low price on all prescription drugs."

## **Congressman Cummings Announces Biotech Career Opportunities**

Congressman Cummings joined East Baltimore Development Inc. (EBDI), the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the BioTechnical Institute of Maryland (BTI) to announce an innovative program to recruit East Baltimore residents into the field of biotechnology. The program was established in an effort to help ensure that residents will participate in the major economic growth anticipated through the East Baltimore Revitalization Initiative.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation awarded BTI \$75,000 to fund seven East Baltimore residents for its Biotechnical Lab Associates Program.

"I am excited about this opportunity for East Baltimore residents to take advantage of free training," Congressman Cummings said. "As we continue to move forward in creating a world-class Biotechnology Park, we're bringing new life to a community by creating jobs in a specialized industry of the future."

The BTI Lab Associates Program was established by Dr. Margaret B. Penno to provide training to highly motivated high school graduates for positions as skilled lab technicians in the biotechnology industry. The students that qualify for the program will receive free training in laboratory techniques, industry knowledge from skilled professionals, hands-on skill development on state-of-the-art equipment, and career placement assistance.

The \$75,000 grant is intended for residents in the revitalization area. It is anticipated that residents will benefit from job training and employment opportunities that will result from the development of a Life Sciences and Biotechnology Park and the business activity that it will generate. The East Baltimore Biotechnology Park will be built from the ground up through the construction of life sciences buildings, retail establishments, new mixed-income housing, rehabilitated housing, parks and streetscapes. It will house 30 to 50 companies, provide up to two million square feet of biotech research facilities, and create up to 8,000 new jobs.

## **Congressman Cummings Introduces Legislation Mandating Loans for Iraqi Infrastructure**

As the Bush Administration prepared to request an additional \$25 billion from Congress to continue the war effort in Iraq, Congressman Cummings introduced legislation requiring that any U.S. assistance given to Iraq for road and infrastructure projects be given in the form of

loans. Congressman Cummings's bill, H.R. 4184, is currently pending in the House International Relations Committee.

Congress has already approved two emergency spending bills for the war, providing \$166 billion to combat global terrorism and fund the war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Whereas, Congressman Cummings voted for the initial supplemental funding bill authorizing \$79 billion to equip the troops in Iraq, he voted against the subsequent \$87 billion.

"While I am supportive of giving the troops what they needed to complete their mission, I have serious reservations about providing billions more for reconstruction at a time when our country is running record deficits." Congressman Cummings said.

At the same time, the U.S. transportation infrastructure is also in drastic need of repair, noted Congressman Cummings, who serves on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. If the same transportation investment allocated to Iraq were to be spent in the United States, every \$1 billion spent would create 47,000 jobs and \$6.2 billion in economic activity, according to research conducted by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

He pointed out that Iraq has the third largest oil reserve in the world. With oil production at 2.3 million to 2.5 million barrels a day, Iraq could add \$14 billion to its treasury this year.

"With substantial transportation needs at home, federal dollars should be invested in our infrastructure," Congressman Cummings said. "Meanwhile, the revenue from Iraq's oil production could help to finance its economic revival and road reconstruction."

### **Congressman Cummings's District Offices**

**1010 Park Avenue, Suite 105  
Baltimore, MD 21201**  
(410) 685-9199 and (410) 685-9399 fax

**754 Frederick Road  
Catonsville, Maryland 21228**  
(410) 719-8777 and (410) 455-0110 fax

### **Howard County Outreach Centers**

**First Monday of the Month:**  
Glenwood Library, 2350 Route 97  
Cooksville, MD 21723  
**Hours: 4:00PM - 6:00PM or by appointment**

**Second Monday of the Month:**  
Howard County Central Library  
10375 Little Patuxent Pkwy.  
Columbia, MD 21044  
**Hours: 4:00PM - 6:00PM or by appointment**

**Second Wednesday of the Month:**  
Savage Library, 9525 Durness Lane  
Laurel, MD 20723  
**Hours: 4:00PM - 6:00PM or by appointment**

**Third Monday of the Month:**  
Florence Bain Senior Center  
5470 Ruth Keeton Way  
Columbia, MD 21044  
**Hours: 9:00AM - 11 AM or by appointment**

**Fourth Monday of the Month:**  
Miller Branch Library, 9421 Frederick Road  
Ellicott City, MD 21042  
**Hours: 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM or by  
appointment**

